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ZEN IN THE CRAFT OF ACTING

By

Patti Lynn Heying  
B.A., University of Kentucky, 1984  
M.A., University of Kentucky, 1987

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Faculty of the  
Graduate School of the University of Louisville  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

Master of Fine Arts

Department of Theatre  
University of Louisville  
Louisville, Kentucky

May 2007

ZEN IN THE CRAFT OF ACTING

By

Patti Lynn Herring  
B.A., University of Kentucky, 1984  
M.A., University of Kentucky, 1987

A Thesis Approved on

March 28, 2007

By the following Thesis Committee:

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Thesis Director

## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my father

C.J. Heying

who taught me to enjoy the entire journey - including the rough spots.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Rinda Frye, Dr. Russell Vandenbroucke and Dr. Julia Dietrich for their assistance. I would also like to thank Professor James Tompkins for his keen eye and generous spirit and Dennis Krausnick for his gentle guidance. I wish to thank Mark Hardin for his love and understanding while I spent so many days away from home. Finally, many thanks to my parents, Carolyn and Gordon Gaddie, for their loving support and encouragement.

## ABSTRACT

### ZEN IN THE CRAFT OF ACTING

Patti Lynn Heying

May 12, 2007

In fulfillment of the thesis project requirement for the Master of Fine Arts Degree at the University of Louisville, I portrayed the role of Paulina in William Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*. The production was directed by Dennis Krausnick, co-founder of Shakespeare and Company in Lennox, Massachusetts.

This document explores the nature of zen in acting: a euphoric, heightened state of awareness sometimes achieved during a performance. I will examine how the rehearsal process for this particular play prepared the cast to better achieve moments of zen. I will also describe how to apply these same tactics to other plays in order to achieve similar results.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

*Man is a thinking reed but his great works are done  
when he is not calculating and thinking.<sup>1</sup>*

Actors perform in contained chaos. The director's voice echoes in their minds telling them where to move, how to move and what to do when they get there. Their lips and tongues attempt to twist around foreign dialects. Costumes pinch and constrict various body parts, so raising an arm above the head is nigh impossible. They can't breathe properly because their ribs are cinched and walking is a challenge because the soles of the shoes refuse to grip the polished stage floor. Enormous lights blind them. The glue holding a false beard in place causes a rash. In the midst of all of this, they are trying to remember their lines, their objectives, their tactics, and why they ever thought they could be actors.

I ask myself that question at some point in every rehearsal period. I have been performing for over twenty-five years, so I have asked that question often. It usually bubbles up in my conscious mind mid-way into the rehearsal process when it is all so overwhelming. I stumble around onstage as if the ability to walk and talk simultaneously is suddenly a new concept. Then at some mystical point, the walking and talking smooth into a rhythm. The language flows easier off my tongue. Everything gradually falls into place, one piece at a time, until the show opens and we share our story with an audience. The play takes on a life of its own and sometimes, in the midst of sharing our story, the



most amazing thing happens. The energy of the play shifts into exactly the right place. There is no sense of past or future, only “now.” I do not think about my next line. I am completely present in the moment, listening with new ears to information and responding accordingly. I lose my sense of “self” and I ride a kind of euphoric wave of energy. I call it zen; zen with a little “z.”

In *Zen in the Art of Archery*, Eugen Herrigel recounts his amazing six-year experience in Japan immersing himself in the theory and practice of Zen Buddhism. Herrigel describes Zen as a state of being devoid of “self.” He quotes Takuan, a great Zen Master and swordsman::

“All is emptiness: your own self, the flashing sword, and the arms that wield it. Even the thought of emptiness is no longer there.” From this absolute emptiness, states Takuan, “comes the most wondrous unfoldment of doing.”<sup>2</sup>

The journey toward this emptiness, however, is long and arduous, requiring years of unrelenting practice. I was drawn to Herrigel’s description, because it is so applicable to what I have experienced onstage. Granted, my experiences pale in comparison to those who follow the true path of Zen. In borrowing this word to describe a state-of-being in acting, I do not wish to diminish or denigrate in any way this respected Eastern religion. Instead, I use it as a means of describing the euphoria I have felt at times while performing.

This heightened state of awareness is also found in the sports world. Hundreds of articles and books examine sports psychology. One of the earliest and arguably, most successful, is W. Timothy Gallwey’s book, *The Inner Game of Tennis*. He describes a process of letting go of oneself in order to reach a heightened sense of awareness in the

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<sup>1</sup> Daisetz T. Suzuki in his Introduction to Eugen Herrigel’s book, *Zen in the Art of Archery*

<sup>2</sup> *Zen in the Art of Archery*, page 77.

game. The breath, the muscles, and the senses align with the other players, the racket and the ball. “Self” is removed and the player performs almost unconsciously. Gallwey explains:

Perhaps a better way to describe the player who is ‘unconscious’ is by saying that his mind is so concentrated, so focused, that it is *still*. It becomes one with what the body is doing, and the unconscious or automatic functions are working without interference from thoughts. The concentrated mind has no room for thinking how well the body is doing, much less of the how-to’s of the doing. When the player is in this state, there is little to interfere with the full expression of his potential to perform, learn and enjoy.<sup>3</sup>

In both of the books mentioned, the necessary process to achieve this heightened state of awareness requires strict discipline, constant repetition and attention to breath. I propose that the same approach applies to acting. It took Herrigel six years to become a Master. He spent an entire year learning only how to draw the bowstring. Actors don’t have the luxury of that much time when working on a single show, but we have a lifetime to hone our skills. Acting is a craft. Webster’s Dictionary defines “craft” as “an occupation requiring special skill.” Of course, theatre is an art form, but as actors, we are too often caught up in the notion that being an “artist” elevates us above anything average or mundane. Sometimes we fall victim to a sense of superiority and fail to recognize the practical side of acting. We believe that as “artists” our feelings and instincts will get us through any play. We either ignore or forget the importance of honing our craft with hours of work to improve our voices and bodies, not to mention the amount of time required both in and out of rehearsal to prepare a role. Actors have a choice: they can either rely on their instincts, hoping that a theatre Muse will smile upon them in performance, or they can better prepare themselves in order to invite zen.

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<sup>3</sup> W. Timothy Gallwey, *The Inner Game of Tennis*, revised edition (New York: Random House, 1974), p. 8.

After performing for so many years, I remember only a handful of moments when I reached this level of still concentration onstage. I experienced such a moment while performing Paulina in my thesis show, *The Winter's Tale*, directed by Dennis Krausnick of Shakespeare and Company. With so many past performances and so few glorious moments of zen, I have to wonder, "Why is it so bloody difficult?" This thesis paper attempts to answer that question.

Dennis's rehearsal process was entirely different from anything I've experienced in the past. His process provided such a strong foundation, one so deeply rooted in the world of the play, that the actors were in a much better position to let go of themselves and discover zen moments in the play. The majority of this paper examines his process. Chapter II describes my past training and in Chapter III, I explore the themes in the play and how Paulina functions within the play's construct. Chapters IV through VII, delve into Dennis's rehearsal process. I describe my various experiences once we introduced the play to an audience in Chapter VII, and in the final chapter, "Reflections," I examine what I have experienced since the show closed and how I continue to process what I've learned.

## CHAPTER II

### PERSONAL HISTORY

*“You must hold the drawn bowstring,” answered the Master, “like a little child holding the proffered finger. It grips it so firmly that one marvels at the strength of the tiny fist. And when it lets the finger go, there is not the slightest jerk. Do you know why? Because a child doesn’t think: I will now let go of the finger in order to grasp this other thing. Completely unself-consciously, without purpose, it turns from one to the other, and we would say that it was playing with the things, were it not equally true that the things are playing with the child.”<sup>4</sup>*

I think too much. I vividly, and somewhat painfully, remember an acting class many years ago at the University of Kentucky. I performed a scene for the class and thought I had really nailed it. I had wept and tossed myself around onstage with complete abandon. Panting and sweating, I anxiously waited on the stage for the roars of approval from my peers. There was a moment of total silence and then the instructor said, “You’re thinking too much up there.” What? I didn’t understand. I had paid attention in class. I had thrown myself whole-heartedly into Stanislavsky (or at least the bits and pieces of his training that we were given) and tried to immerse myself in the character. I had marked beats in scripts until my fingers went numb. I had delved into my own past to connect my passions to those of the character. Apparently, I still didn’t “get” it. At some point during my training, I had forgotten some very basic principles I instinctively knew as a child.

I grew up without siblings on an isolated farm in the middle of Kentucky. My only playmates were dogs and cats and the various other critters that wandered onto the property. I was not allowed to loiter inside the house. My mother gave me two choices:

stay inside and dust furniture or go outside and play. I often chose the latter. To entertain myself, I created imaginary worlds filled with interesting characters and cast myself in the leading roles. I battled pirates, hid from flesh-eating dinosaurs and stalked evil white settlers. I played out my fantasies along creek beds and in the wooded hills of our farm. These were the unofficial beginnings of my training. It was probably some of the best acting I have ever done. My lines rose organically out of each given moment. I was absolutely present and no matter what crossed my path, I dealt with it as it occurred and not in some pre-determined fashion. Each discovery was real. My childhood play-acting was honest and truthful, full of delight and wonder. Years later, I went to college to study acting and everything fell apart.

In college, I learned to separate beats in a script. I learned to speak words that were not my own. I learned about cue lines and the “moment before,” how to mimic animal energies and create a psychological gesture. I learned how to relive moments from my past so that my body could revisit long-buried emotions. All of this was meant to make me a better actor. Armed with this information, I hit the stage. I suppose my work at that time was passable, but something seemed out of step. I certainly knew more than I did as a child. What they couldn’t teach me, though, was how to forget everything I’d been taught once I walked onto the stage. Acting felt very calculated and rehearsed. I would listen for my cue, try to look as if I were reacting but I was really rehearsing my next line in my head. I got pretty good at wearing that mask. There were moments of zen, though, and that was gratifying. Then I reached a point in my last year of study when the training failed me.

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<sup>4</sup> *Zen in the Art of Archery*, p 30.

I spent part of a summer playing Jesse in *'night Mother*. This is a ninety-minute play without intermission. It ends with Jesse shooting herself offstage. The play revolves around Jesse's attempt to prepare her mother for what is going to happen. In preparation, I diligently immersed myself in the character. I learned to chain-smoke. I delved into my own psyche to understand the nature of suicide and how I could be capable of such an act. I spent an entire summer in the depths of a deep depression that left me wondering how actors survive long-running shows because this one would surely have killed me. I had been given tools to study a character but not the tools to protect myself. By immersing myself in the world of the play, I certainly experienced zen moments onstage. In performance, I felt I was riding that wave of energy. I was lost in the character and the moment, and I was listening, and it felt like flying. Unfortunately, my personal life was a wreck. I stopped laughing. I ignored my friends. I cut myself off from all of the people who meant the most to me. At the end of that experience, I vowed never to let that happen again and something inside of me shut down as an actor. Surely, I thought, there must be another way. The following spring, I graduated with my Masters Degree, packed up my belongings and my cats and drove north.

I moved to Minnesota and within a year, I was hired by an educational theatre company called CLIMB, Inc. (Creative Learning Ideas for Mind and Body). The company was comprised of two sections: the touring theatre company and the educational company. I performed and taught in CLIMB's Education Branch. My work involved talking to teachers about their learning goals for their students and then creating short "mini-dramas" for their classrooms to help students reach those goals. For example, a second grade teacher might want her students to show more respect for other

classmates and we would write a thirty-minute piece for two actors that involved the students in a short play dealing with issues of respect. Often in a day, I would perform up to five or six distinctly different characters. The skills I acquired focused on using my voice and body to create an engaging character. In some of the mini-dramas, I played more than one character; each had to be very detailed, specific and unique. There was no time to “get into character” in this kind of fast-paced work and the characters had to be consistent. I learned to use “character hooks” to maintain dialect and physicality. For example, I would create a character who always walked with a severe limp and slumped to one side. If at any time, I felt the character start to slip away, a quick body check to get back into position would help maintain the character. Children are a wonderful audience because they accept these odd characters so quickly but they are also quick to notice if an actor slips out of character.

I nearly always performed with one other actor and we worked from scripts. However, we always enlisted the children as participants and of course, *they* did not know the script. Through our questioning, we could guide their responses, but we never really knew what they would say or do, so we had to remain flexible. At the same time, we had to be very clear on the central theme of the play in order to keep the piece on track. I honed my listening skills during my four years with this company. I also learned the value of making precise physical and vocal choices when creating characters. Prior to this, I had never really paid much attention to what I was doing physically and vocally. I simply trusted that as I worked on the psychology of the character, the external characterizations would fall into place. I reveled in this new approach to working and

found that I could elicit emotional responses from the audience without digging into my own psyche.

Returning to Kentucky, the first show I performed was, *Execution of Justice*, by Emily Mann. I performed several characters and found that my training with CLIMB had been excellent preparation. This piece was created by putting together actual interviews and transcripts from the trial of Dan White, who assassinated Mayor George Moscone and Supervisor Harvey Milk in 1978 at City Hall in San Francisco. My scenes were like news clips. By analyzing the words and then developing strong physical and vocal characteristics for each role, I created consistently strong and individual characters. Many of my scenes were delivered directly to the audience. My previous classroom experience with CLIMB had taught me how to use the audience as my acting partner; carefully watching their reactions and then adjusting my delivery based on what I received from them. Following this show, I performed Ma Joad in *The Grapes of Wrath*, Lady Croom in *Arcadia*, Mrs. Keller in *The Miracle Worker* and Beatrice in *Much Ado about Nothing*. I also worked with an improvisation troupe and further developed the skills of listening and reacting to given circumstances.

I performed the role of Ma Joad about a year after closing *Execution of Justice*. Ma is a demanding role and in rehearsal, I came to another crossroad. After losing so much, Ma says good-bye to her son, Tom. This is a particularly raw moment. Once Tom leaves, she loses practically everything she loves. I remember thinking, “Oh God, not again.” I realized it had been years since I was required to be vulnerable onstage. I started having flashbacks to my *‘night Mother* experience and wondered how I might achieve a level of honesty onstage without raking my soul through hot coals every night.



At the time, I was reading Don Richardson's book, *Acting Without Agony – An Alternative to the Method*. Richardson is very clear on his opinion of Lee Strasberg, The Group Theatre and the Method. He despises them. Richardson, who passed away in 1996, worked as an actor and taught acting for over fifty years. He studied under Charles Jehlinger at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in New York and then after graduating, was invited to join The Group Theatre as an apprentice. In his book, he chastises Strasberg and the Method gang for teaching actors how to scratch themselves and mumble onstage, but not how to be a really good actor. He claims that the use of "affective memory" – in which an actor delves into his or her own personal experiences in order to discover emotions – is not only ineffective but ultimately harmful. Instead, he proposes working from a physiological foundation, then attaching the given information of the scene as a means of achieving honesty in the moment. The training enables actors to create heightened moments of tremendous emotion without turning inward – but always remaining focused on their objectives; take after take.<sup>5</sup>

Using Richardson's advice, I practiced a breathing technique. Richardson describes the process:

The crying trigger is in the back of your throat. I tell the class to feel whatever emotion they've chosen and while thinking, 'to not cry,' to take very deep breaths, hold them for a moment and then let them out. You'll notice that at the peak of holding the breath, you'll feel a little 'catch' in the throat. When you feel it, repeat the 'catch' immediately as if clearing your throat; that's the beginning of the body's sobbing action. As a final instruction, convince yourself that with each large intake of breath your emotion increases.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Don Richardson, *Acting without Agony*

<sup>6</sup> Richardson, p 183.

I was quickly able to bring tears to my eyes without revisiting any sort of tragic event in my life. So, every night in performance, just prior to the “good-bye” scene, I adjusted my breathing, then watched my son as he explained that he had to leave, and . . . *voila!* Tears flowed down my face. It worked like magic. At least I could finish the show each night, walk out of the theatre with a smile on my face and chat with the other actors about where we were going for a round of beer. The drawback to this technique is that I anticipated that moment each night and prepared myself to meet it. I never hit that sweet spot of simply living in the moment of the play – of not knowing what I was going to say next – of just listening and reacting – of trusting myself to fly.

Over the course of the next seven years, I continued to perform in various productions and taught part-time at the University of Kentucky’s Theatre Department. I also secured a job with the State of Kentucky as a training coordinator for public defenders. I used my theatre skills to teach presentation techniques to trial attorneys. More and more, though, my responsibilities in coordinating these events grew as our programming became more involved and my teaching opportunities diminished. Teaching has always been my passion and I decided to return to school to earn my M.F.A. in order to find a job teaching theatre at a university level. My M.F.A. search brought me to the University of Louisville. After years of working for a state agency and only having time to perform once or twice a year, this opportunity has felt like coming home again.

It has been a joy to allow myself the time to focus on the craft of acting and immerse myself, once again, in the world of theatre. As I finished up my first year in the program, I started thinking about thesis roles. I considered several ideas with different

faculty. Nothing materialized. Then in the second semester of my second year, the Theatre Department hosted a gifted teacher/director from Lennox, Massachusetts, Dennis Krausnick, a co-founder of Shakespeare and Company. He taught a voice class and directed *A Winter's Tale*. Dennis cast me in the role of Paulina. This was a tremendous opportunity and I decided it would be a terrific thesis role. After discussing it with my graduate committee, we agreed that although I was only in my second year, I could use this as my thesis. I was thrilled because the training Dennis provided in the voice class was immediately applicable. His directing techniques were dramatically different from anything I had experienced up to this point. He immersed the cast in the play from the beginning so that by the time we opened, I felt fully connected to my character, her history and her relationship to the other characters in the play. I was empowered to act freely in each given moment, knowing that this character was so ingrained in me that any decision would be the right.

## CHAPTER III

### THEMES

#### The Character's Function within the Themes of the Play

I was thrilled that the University of Louisville chose to produce *A Winter's Tale*. I had never seen a production of it. I remembered reading it many years ago in an English class. There were two specific things I remember the instructor telling us: this play has one of the most interesting stage directions ever written into a Shakespearean play, "Exit, pursued by a bear"<sup>7</sup> and it falls into the strange crack between Shakespearean Comedy and Tragedy, which makes it difficult to pull off in production. I asked Dennis why this play was so seldom performed and he seemed surprised by my question. He said that he had directed it four times and had seen several others. I started to think that maybe my experiences had been limited, but after questioning others in the theatre community, they generally agreed that this particular piece is rarely done. I suspect it is due to the huge transition from tragedy to comedy and the strange twist at the end of the play with the statue coming to life.

Dennis's explanation of the play's oddities is that Shakespeare wrote it late in his life when he was perhaps feeling a little more sentimental about his own family and his absence from their lives. He likened the play to a fairy tale and told us, "We don't ask why Snow White hasn't aged when she is awakened by the Prince after being asleep for a hundred years and we don't have to ask how Paulina conceals Hermione for sixteen years

or if her statue is real or not.” I was perfectly happy to accept this explanation. Dennis stated early in the rehearsal process that he feels the crux of the play is Paulina’s line, “It is required you do awake your faith.”<sup>8</sup> In fact, he wanted to make certain that when I spoke these lines, I included the audience and also bounced my voice off the back wall of the auditorium. He wanted that line to ring through the theatre. This production revolved around faith and love. Petty jealousies shred a perfect love and then the rift is mended by those who hold onto their faith that love truly heals all wounds. It’s a tale that could be told on a cold winter’s night by the fire; one that cheers the heart and celebrates the triumph of Love.

There are two very clear and separate worlds in *A Winter’s Tale*: Sicilia and Bohemia. Sicilia, King Leontes’ court, is a place of order and strict codes of justice. In our production, this differentiation was well-supported by the design team. The Sicilian set was severe and painted with shades of grey. The lighting was cold. The costumes were restrictive with high collars and tight jackets. Women were corseted. The inhabitants of this world were expected to behave with reserved grace. The one Sicilian dressed less formally was King Leontes. Interestingly, he is the person who completely disrupts the peace, abuses the law for his own purpose and throws everyone into chaos, ultimately destroying his family. Juxtaposed with Sicilia is the kingdom of Bohemia, which was designed in warmer tones; garlands of flowers and fabric were added to soften the hard edges. The costumes were considerably brighter and looser. Necklines dropped to reveal ample cleavage. The tone of the play shifts dramatically from one location to the next.

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<sup>7</sup> III, iii, 57

<sup>8</sup> V, iii, 94-95

This shift occurs in Act III, scene iii. Antigonus arrives in Bohemia carrying the baby he has been ordered to destroy. He decides to leave the child on the shores of Bohemia and let the gods decide her fate. He arrives in a terrible storm. While he laments the child's fate and his own responsibility in the matter, a bear arrives and chases him offstage amidst a huge clap of thunder and ferocious snarls. Instantly, two clowns arrive. One witnesses the horror of Antigonus's demise and the other discovers the baby. This scene shifts the play into its comedic second half and the shift happens quickly. Dennis envisioned Antigonus speaking above the wind and thunder and at the climax of his speech, an earth-shaking animal growl would interrupt him. Panicked, Antigonus would run off stage, then back across the stage, directly behind a scrim. On the scrim, the audience would see the silhouette of the bear's head swallowing him. Dennis wanted fifteen seconds of terror and then a moment that would make the audience erupt in laughter. I'm not certain his vision was fully realized, but I love the idea. This means of helping the audience shift from the first into the second half of the play could be extremely effective.

Paulina functions in the play as the spokesperson for natural law. Dennis mentioned very early in the rehearsal process that Paulina is governed by nature. She has keen insight into human nature, possesses special knowledge of healing, and is able to harness mysterious powers. He said to think of her as a witch, then stopped quite suddenly, looked directly at me and said, "I mean that in the best possible way."

Paulina is closely aligned with the natural rhythms of the earth: the movements of the sun and moon, the change of seasons and the pulse of the oceans. She recognizes that laws created by men are necessary to governing civilization, but the laws of nature

are designed by the gods and override anything written by men. According to the natural law, a hierarchy exists on earth with the purpose of maintaining balance and order. Royals sit very near the top of this hierarchy which affords them great luxury but wealth and power also come with tremendous responsibility. The system works well when the country is ruled by a just and honest king. Unfortunately, when Leontes becomes obsessed with jealous thoughts, his judgment is skewed. When he accuses his wife, Hermione, of treason and arrests her, Paulina must immediately retaliate to restore balance. When Leontes breaks the natural order, he throws everything out of balance and he must be punished. When that person is a king, the crime is especially heinous, since he is entrusted with the guardianship of his people. Paulina's unwavering faith in the gods gives her the courage to challenge the king. Her sense of what is right in the world is threatened by the king's tyranny and she courageously charges into his private chambers to bring his newborn daughter to soften his heart and return his reason. Natural law guides Paulina's moral compass. She willingly faces her own possible death at the hands of the king in order to right what she perceives as his gross disobedience of this law.

Unable to convince him, she leaves the baby, hoping his heart will soften but her plan fails. The king orders Paulina's husband to take the baby into the wilderness to die. Then he puts his wife on trial for treason. When the oracle is read and pronounces Leontes a tyrant, he ignores the oracle and condemns his wife for treason. The resulting deaths of his young son and wife in quick succession fuel Paulina's rage. In one of the most amazing speeches for a woman in all of Shakespeare's plays, Paulina drags Leontes through the mire of his sins. She names them one by one, each worse than the last. She

sneers that his sins are so great, even the gods cannot look upon him. Paulina becomes a force of nature at its most destructive, whirling around Leontes, flooding him with memories, and crushing him under the weight of his sins. Natural Law meets the Laws of Man; Nature wins.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE REHEARSAL PROCESS

*“When you come to the lessons in the future,” he warned us, “you must collect yourselves on your way here. Focus your minds on what happens in the practice-hall. Walk past everything without noticing it, as if there were only one thing in the world that is important and real, and that is archery!”<sup>9</sup>*

In the first rehearsal, Dennis explained what he expected from all of us. He expected us to attend every rehearsal and if we were not personally involved in the scene, we were to watch and provide support. He asked for total concentration in the rehearsal space at all times. Private conversations should take place only in the hallway. We were to arrive on time and we would always begin with a group warm-up. This atmosphere brought us all much closer together. Each of us had a part in telling this story and if we were to tell it well, we had to immerse ourselves in it.

Immersion results in being so familiar with the text that I never have to think about my lines. The words come naturally. In the past, I would start memorizing lines early. However, Dennis did not want us to memorize our lines until rehearsals started. He was concerned that we would memorize a particular way of saying the line which would stifle our spontaneity once we were working with our scene partners. I typically try to avoid doing that. I do not pre-determine *how* I am going to say something: that shifts with each performance, based on what the other actors send me as well as the energy coming from the audience. If I have memorized *how* I say the lines, then it's too

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<sup>9</sup> *Zen in the Art of Archery*, p. 34

easy to panic if a performance doesn't go according to my exact plan, and it rarely does. So, I simply memorize *what* I say. The easiest memorization method is to figure out exactly *why* I am saying a line. I examine each line for its intention. This helps with memorization and also character development. If I understand why I say a certain line, I also understand the character's worldview: how she perceives the world around her. Once I begin to understand how my character sees the world, I experiment with where my center of gravity is in my body and use the rehearsal time to test various choices. The placement of the center of gravity affects how a person walks and moves through space.

In Paulina's worldview, nature governs the earth and there is a natural order to all things on the earth. Physically, she is firmly grounded in the earth as though with deep roots. I placed my center of gravity in the lower abdominal area with the pelvis tilted forward slightly. This created a stance that was so firmly grounded, it would be difficult to move me unless I wanted to be moved. Paulina draws tremendous strength from the earth and this enables her to withstand Leontes' vicious attacks. I don't wish to imply that Paulina moves in any sort of plodding fashion. Her movements can be quite swift and direct, particularly when enraged. Since she has an affinity for nature, I chose to curve through space, so that if someone could trace my movement on the stage floor, the lines would curve and swirl, much like a river through the landscape. This contrasts nicely with Leontes' more linear and angular movements.

Dennis's rehearsal methods were amazingly helpful in developing the character, establishing connections with the other actors and learning the lines all at the same time. At the first read-through of the play, we sat in a circle and when our character entered a scene, Dennis asked us to walk into the center of the circle. He instructed us to give as

much eye contact as possible to the other actors during the scene and gave us the freedom to move about in the circle, working on the spatial relationships between ourselves and our scene partners. This method is a far more active approach to a first read-through than I had ever experienced. We moved around the space, lifted our eyes off the page and looked into the faces of our fellow actors. In my previous experiences, a first read-through is tiring and even tedious for those who have fewer lines, but Dennis's method invigorated everyone. Dennis took this time to correct mispronunciations and to coach us on breathing at the end of each line of verse. This was the last time any of us held a script in rehearsal.

Following the read-through, rehearsals consisted of "dropping in" the entire play. This method of rehearsing stems from Dennis's work with the company he co-founded with his wife, Tina Packer, and Kristin Linklater. His intention is that once the entire show has been dropped-in, all of the actors have a clear understanding of the play, their lines and their relationships to the other characters. A history is created for the characters in a relatively short amount of time. The actors conjure rich imagery from which to work, and the process is an amazing directing tool. However, I would caution anyone planning to use this as a rehearsal tool as it could be easily misused or could tap into an actor's subconscious in very painful ways. I have used dropping-in as a director since my experience with Dennis with varying degrees of success. In the following chapter, I will discuss the benefits and the dangers of this rehearsal tool, so for now, I will simply describe it.

In a two-character scene, the two actors sit in straight-backed chairs with flat seats; they sit upright with their knees interlocking; they relax and allow their breath to

drop all the way down to their pelvic floor; they maintain eye contact with one another through the entire exercise. Then, the person(s) dropping them in will say a word/phrase or line from the text and the actor repeats the word(s). The facilitator then asks a question or brings up an image for the actor to contemplate as he or she allows another breath to drop in. On the exhale, the actor repeats the phrase or line. The actor never answers the questions aloud, she only repeats the words she has been given by the facilitator. The key is to allow the mind to be open to whatever images might arise, to consider them while taking in breath and then to speak the line on the exhale. There is no emphasis on changing the way the line is said, although that sometimes occurs. The facilitator has the actor repeat the line three to five times as new questions or images are quietly spoken to them. This process continues, line by line, for the entire scene. For larger group scenes, the actors sit in a tight circle and there are several facilitators.

Kristin Linklater describes this process in her book, *Freeing Shakespeare's Voice*. The chapter entitled "Word and Images" beautifully explains dropping-in.<sup>10</sup> Linklater describes this process as a means of slowing down to breathe *in* the words and allowing images to rise up in connection with the words. She explains,

When words are *seen, tasted, touched, felt*, they penetrate and break up patterns of thought. They reach into emotions, memories, associations, and they spark the imagination. They bring life. The *way* you speak Shakespeare's words will determine the *depth* at which you plumb his meaning.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Freeing Shakespeare's Voice*, pp. 30-44.

<sup>11</sup> *Freeing Shakespeare's Voice*, p. 31.

She suggests asking at least three questions about each word or phrase. She categorizes the questions in the following manner: “1) The Senses; 2) The Emotions; 3) Memory; 4) Personal Association; 5) Imagination; 6) Vowel/Consonant Dynamics.”<sup>12</sup>

This particular method of dropping-in, if used carefully, is an excellent means of tapping into emotions and it quickly builds relationships rich with history. Actors who hardly knew each other were able to connect and establish the kind of history that usually takes weeks of rehearsal. As a side-note, I have used dropping-in as a director in two other non-Shakespearean plays since learning the process with Dennis. I found that it helped inexperienced actors explore deeper meaning in their lines. However, it was more effective with actors who could allow their imaginations to run free. In one situation, I tried to establish a close bond between two very inexperienced actors who were to play cousins. One readily accepted the images I gave her but the other never quite seemed able to do so. This woman had never performed in her life and balked at the process. Just getting her to look her acting partner in the eye was difficult. Looking back on the experience, I think I would have these two women play some games which involved physical contact and watching and listening before ever introducing them to dropping-in.

For our purposes in *The Winter's Tale* however, I thought the dropping-in was especially helpful for actors in terms of knowing what the words meant. Once the entire show had been dropped-in, it was evident that even the most inexperienced actors knew exactly what they were saying and why they were saying it.

After dropping-in the entire show, we ran the play on our feet but without scripts. Instead, another actor who was not needed for that scene would hold a script, follow an actor as she performed the scene and quietly read her lines. The actor would begin to

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<sup>12</sup> *Freeing Shakespeare's Voice*, p. 40.

speak the lines as she heard them. As a result, this actor was listening and speaking and connecting to her scene partner simultaneously. The voice of the reader overlapped the voice of the actor. This process allowed us to look the other actors in the eye and move about the space. Initially, it took some getting used to but as we became accustomed to talking and listening to our “reader” at the same time, we soon settled into the pattern. I know directors who have used this process with high school students with learning disabilities work through their fear of reading and act on the words as they hear them. It gets right to the heart of the work. We by-passed the transition of trying to move, read our lines and look at our acting partners. This is an awkward phase of rehearsals, so jumping past it altogether put us several steps ahead. There is a huge benefit to memorizing the lines while looking at my scene partner. With a “reader” walking behind me, I am able to concentrate solely on my relationship to the other actors. I memorize my intentions as I speak the lines. My intentions are easier to identify because I have another human being standing in front of me.

Following this period in rehearsal, we left for a week of spring break and were told to return with the text memorized. We were able to call for lines but were never allowed to hold a script. One of the interesting elements to Dennis’s rehearsals is that he never set an official date for us to be completely off book. We simply did not have the script in our hand after the first read-through. Then, we were allowed to call for a line as we needed it. He trusted us to do our work. I enjoyed this level of professionalism. Dennis assumed we would be prepared to open the show and we were. I also enjoyed the sense of “oneness” that developed out of his rehearsals. As often as possible, we watched

the rehearsals, including the acts and scenes not involving our characters. I felt supported by the other people in the play.

Another practical result of watching all rehearsals is that I learned information that directly affected my character. One evening, I watched a rehearsal of Act V, scene ii, which is the scene immediately preceding my entrance with Leontes. I listened while the actors described Perdita's joyous return to Sicilia. The Third Gentleman describes Paulina's offstage reunion with the young princess: "She lifted the Princess from the earth, and so locks her in embracing as if she would pin her to her heart, that she might no more be in danger of losing."<sup>13</sup> I suddenly realized that in the next scene, I barely glanced at the actress playing Perdita. Most of my lines in that next scene are directed to Leontes, and as a result, I had forgotten everyone else sharing the space with us. I explored how I might speak to Leontes and also make physical contact with Perdita. Changing my patterns enriched the scene and helped to establish my bond with the princess. I connected more thoroughly with what was happening in that scene as a whole. I had gotten tunnel-vision but once I widened my scope to include everyone else onstage, I was able to explore new levels of meaning.

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<sup>13</sup> V, ii, 81-84.

## CHAPTER V

### BENEFITS AND DANGERS OF DROPPING-IN

There is infinite value to dropping-in. However, there are also certain dangers. Linklater cautions about the type of questioning a facilitator uses. She warns, “The questions should not be psychoanalytical.”<sup>14</sup> Examples of helpful questions might be “Where in your body do you feel this?” or “Feel the vowels and consonants in your body.” Unhelpful and possibly exploitative questioning might be, “What’s the saddest thing in your life right now?” or “Were you abused as a child?”<sup>15</sup>

I highly recommend reading Linklater’s book before attempting to use dropping-in as a rehearsal tool. The facilitator, especially if he is the director, could easily skew the questions to suit his own design, and try to dig at an actor’s painful personal memories in order to push him or her toward an emotional release. An actor’s personal issues are for him or her to work out with a good therapist. On the other hand, actors must be able to access to his or her emotions quickly and easily. This is when the imagination is infinitely valuable to the actor.

Regarding the darker side to dropping-in, I participated in a dropping-in session that went too far into an actor’s own personal trauma. I base this opinion on my observations of what later happened in performance. We were dropping in the scene between Paulina and Leontes just following Hermione’s death. Paulina enters with a

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<sup>14</sup> *Freeing Shakespeare’s Voice*, page 40

<sup>15</sup> *Freeing Shakespeare’s Voice*, page 41



howl and rages at the king for nearly two pages. She lists his past transgressions, describing how each sin is worse than the last until he has now, in effect, murdered his wife. As we dropped-in the scene, the actor playing Leontes tapped into his own personal losses. I don't recall Dennis asking him about personal loss, but the actor clearly conjured up some terribly painful memories. The two of us began to cry and the crying turned to wails. Dennis coached us to continue speaking through the tears.

Linklater speaks about this. She explains,

When a strong emotion comes up in response to a word, YOU MUST SPEAK THE WORD. Do not stop to cry, laugh or scream outside the word. You are exercising the ability to feel and speak at the same time, reconnecting thought/feeling/speaking mechanisms which may have been dislocated from each other at some earlier time in your development. If your throat wants to close on the words, notice that and yawn your throat open while you continue feeling what you are feeling and SPEAK THE WORD OUT THROUGH YOUR WHOLE BODY.<sup>16</sup>

The emotions this actor experienced that evening were raw and directly connected to personal losses he had experienced. We finished the scene, and Dennis coached him to breath evenly and to release whatever emotions he was feeling at the moment. The actor emitted a loud, deep wail, sending chills up my spine. Dennis massaged his shoulders and I hugged him until he calmed. This session tapped into a pocket of grief that appeared to shake that actor's foundation. By contrast, the emotions I felt during the session were also quite real, but were more connected to what was happening in that moment rather than to anything from my personal history. I was able to let go of what had happened at the end of the session and then recreate the experience later in performance. I cannot speak to what happened inside that actor every time we performed

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<sup>16</sup> *Freeing Shakespeare's Voice*, page 41

the scene, but it appeared that he was never able to recreate the same kind of vulnerability he had reached in rehearsal. My theory is that it was just too painful.

The human body has ways of dealing with that much pain and shutting down is one of them. Months after the show closed, he admitted that he was still dealing with what had transpired at that dropping-in session. Herein lies the danger of this type of work and it should be used with caution. Directors are usually not trained therapists and are not equipped, no matter how compassionate or empathic, to handle the repercussions of this kind of emotional dredging. Particularly dangerous are those directors who knowingly manipulate actors by dragging them through their own personal mire.

As actors, we have a responsibility to come to terms with our own demons so that we clear away enough garbage that we can be in contact with a full range of emotions. A rehearsal hall is not the place to do that. Granted, the unforeseen happens. Plays deal with emotionally charged material, otherwise they wouldn't really be worth watching. So, in the process of digging through that information, some actors are bound to stumble upon long-buried issues in rehearsal. Also, no matter how careful and respectful, sometimes a director inadvertently opens emotional wounds in an actor. Perhaps this is what happened in our rehearsal. So, we all dealt with the pain in that moment but it did not ultimately benefit the final performance.

So, if I am not pulling from my own experiences, then how do I reach those heightened emotions and vulnerable states? Dennis explained one evening that it doesn't matter whether I cried or not in any scene. What *does* matter is that I am listening and responding as honestly as possible in each moment. As it turns out, I never had any problem crying during the trial scene. I listened to Hermione's beautiful words. My

objective was to support her. I rarely took my eyes off of her. As the trial continued and Leontes stubbornly refused to change his mind, I became more and more incensed by the injustice. My expectation for the trial was that Hermione would be found innocent and released. I believed that the king would come to his senses. When he didn't and then ignored the sacred words of the Oracle, I was outraged and tears poured down my face. The emotion bubbled up in response to my expectations crashing to pieces. I never thought, "O.K., I have to cry here." That only serves to remove me from the scene and distances me from the other actors. If I am thinking those kinds of thoughts, then I am consumed with myself. "Self" must be removed from the equation and all attention must be focused on the other actors.

## CHAPTER VI

### BREATHING SHAKESPEARE

*The breathing in, like the breathing out, is practiced again and again  
by itself with the utmost care.*<sup>17</sup>

Working on this play opened an entirely new world to me in terms of breath control and speaking Shakespeare's poetry. I was introduced to the concept of taking a breath only at the end of each line of poetry earlier when I performed in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and working on sonnets in Professor Frye's voice classes. I don't think I ever fully embraced the idea. I learned in high school to breathe only where there is punctuation in order to make a complete thought. When Dennis enforced the idea of breathing at the end of each line of poetry (in prose, we followed the rule of grammar by breathing on the punctuation), my first instinct was to dig in my heels and fight this notion. It simply didn't make any sense to me and when I attempted it, the words sounded artificial and at worst, had a sing-song quality that I hated. Fortunately, I was also taking Dennis's voice class, and we rehearsed monologues and sonnets in which he reinforced this breath control. As I began to practice, I realized that the breath at the end of the line did not have to signal the end of a thought but was a means of fueling the entire thought. When we speak naturally, we often breathe in the middle of a thought while we contemplate what we are going to say next. We rarely plan what we are going

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<sup>17</sup> *Zen in the Art of Archery*, p. 35.

to say and often take brief pauses to find the exact word. Shakespearean verse works much the same way.

The fog lifted when Dennis explained in class one day that in the Elizabethan period, there were no set rules of grammar or spelling, and punctuation was used in a very different way our modern usage. Instead, Elizabethan writers followed rules of rhetoric and the iambic pentameter offered a means of revealing a character's state of mind. The natural rhythm of the English language is the iamb. It is also the rhythm of a heart beat. By using iambic pentameter, the writer directs the speaker when to stress a word or syllable and when to take a natural breath. If the breath comes at the end of the line and the end of the line is in the middle of a thought, then the speaker must suspend the voice in an upward inflection in order to sustain the thought. The effect sounds much more like natural speech than I'd ever imagined. Linklater explains the value of speaking poetry,

The iambic pentameter arranges and orchestrates thoughts and speech in a particular way for energy of thought and speech, generates an electrical charge which can burn through the daily lassitude of our prose-ridden minds to revive imagination and creativity in both speaker and listener. The relationship forged between actor and audience by poetry is different from that formed in prose.<sup>18</sup>

She goes on to say,

"There is. . .a vital discovery to be made about the place where the line ends in Shakespeare's verse. It is not arbitrary. It goes beyond the expression of poetic craft. The choice of the final word in the pentameter line is intentional and the actor who pays attention to how the line ends taps into a rich seam of acting information."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> *Freeing Shakespeare's Voice*, p 153

<sup>19</sup> *Freeing Shakespeare's Voice*, p. 153

Linklater admits there are numerous approaches to speaking verse. She seems to ascribe, primarily, to the teachings of John Barton of the Royal Shakespeare Company who taught that the speaker must breathe at the end of each line. She refers to this as “The Barton Rule.”<sup>20</sup> Working with Dennis, I realized that taking a breath at the end of each line signals an emotional shift. I began to examine the text in a different way. I analyzed why a line ended or began with a certain word. That knowledge would help me in developing Paulina’s emotional state.

An exchange between Leontes, Antigonus and Paulina in Act II, scene iii illustrates this point. Paulina has brought Hermione’s newborn daughter to the king to prove to him that the child is his. Paulina hopes to soften his heart and make him forget his foolish jealousy by presenting him with his innocent child. Leontes’s mind is so clouded with jealousy, however, that he refuses to acknowledge the child as his own. In a desperate move to force the king’s hand, Paulina places the newborn in the middle of the floor. This is a last-chance tactical maneuver and she hopes that the king will come to his senses, take up the child and comfort it. Her plan fails and Leontes orders Paulina’s own husband, Antigonus, to take up the child and dispose of it. In the following dialogue, I will insert my interpretation of how the breath at the end of the line works to fuel the emotional energy of the scene:

Leontes: . . . Take up the bastard,  
Take ‘t up, I say; give ‘t to thy crone.

Paulina: **Forever** (*this word completes the pentameter of Leontes’s line and by taking a breath at the end of the word, it should absolutely ring with authority, stopping Antigonus in his tracks. The breath then fuels the rest of the thought.*)

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<sup>20</sup> *Freeing Shakespeare’s Voice*, pp. 153-154.

**Unvenerable be thy hands, if thou** (*These words should shake with passion as she takes another breath to prepare to use the King's own words in argument against him.*)

**Tak'st up the Princess, by that forced baseness** (*Note that "Princess" juxtaposes Leontes's "bastard," in his previous lines, so here, it has more weight. – then another breath to allow that to register with the listeners and as she prepares to drive home message*)

**Which he has put upon't!**<sup>21</sup>

In this scene, Paulina dances on dangerous ground with the king. She must phrase her words carefully with this powerful man. At any moment, he could condemn her and her husband to death, have the child thrown to wolves and be done with all of them.

Throughout the scene, she employs several persuasive tactics from cajoling to pleading and ultimately to berating him as if he were a child. By the time they reach the moment quoted above, Paulina must be careful not to lose control. This is her last opportunity to save the child, so she carefully chooses each phrase. The line endings support this observation. Linklater explains,

You will find . . . that the end of a line is not just a breath change – it is an emotional change, a thought change, an impulse shift. These will often spark a breath change, but not always. You will find that, by allowing the end of the line to alert you to inner change, you sound as if you are thinking the words for the first time by seeming to search for the word which the audience knows you know. The searches are built into the structure of the lines which figure forth the alive thinking, the moment-to-moment impulses of the human mind.<sup>22</sup>

Sometimes, the breath also allows time for an action, as in a later moment in the same scene when Paulina describes the features of the child as she holds it up for the other lords to observe:

Paulina: **Although the print be little, the whole matter** (*breath as she considers the right word*)

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<sup>21</sup> II, iii, 73-78.

<sup>22</sup> *Freeing Shakespeare's Voice*, p. 155.

**And copy of the father: eye, nose, lip,** (*breath as Paulina reacts to the child's expression.*)

**The trick of 's frown, his forehead, nay, the valley,** (*breath as Paulina tweaks at the baby's cheek to make it laugh*)

**The pretty dimples of his chin and cheek; his smiles;** (*breath as Paulina gives her pinkie to the baby to hold and marvels at the little hand*)

**The very mold and frame of hand, nail, finger.**<sup>23</sup>

It's important to note that taking a breath at the end of the line does not also equal a huge pause. The breath should come naturally and inaudibly. Sometimes the breath is rapid, fueling the next thought as the words tumble out of the mouth. In this case, the placement of the breath gives the impression of someone who is in a heightened state of emotion. For example, following the queen's collapse in Act III, scene ii, her limp body is carried out of the room and Paulina follows to administer to her. Moments later, Paulina enters in a rage. The tirade that follows is a wonderful challenge and as I began to explore the speech using this breathing technique, I realized just how much fun it is to play. By contrast, if the breath were taken only at the punctuation, it would look like this:

What studied torments, tyrant, hast for me? (*breath*) /  
What wheels, racks, fires? (*breath*)  
What flaying, boiling / In leads or oils? (*breath*)  
What old or newer torture / Must I receive, (*breath*)  
whose every word deserves / To taste of thy most worst. (*breath*)  
Thy tyranny, / Together working with thy jealousies, (*breath*) /  
Fancies too weak for boys, (*breath*)  
too green and idle / For girls of nine – (*breath*)  
O, think what they have done, (*breath*) /  
And then run mad indeed, (*breath*)  
stark mad; (*breath*)  
for all / Thy bygone fooleries were but spices of it.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> II, iii, 97-101.

<sup>24</sup> III, ii, 173-182.



I marked the line endings with a slash in the above section. Only three times in this section does the punctuation coincide with the ending of the line. If I were to read the above section out loud as it is written, I would sound angry but also very logical and in control. Instead, if I breathe only at the line endings, the speech becomes choppy and I appear to struggle to find the correct word. Then, when I find the right word, the next thought tumbles out. For example;

Fancies too weak for boys, too green and idle / (*breath as I struggle to find the image that would insult him the most*)  
For girls of nine – (*no breath as the next thought rushes out*) O, think what they have done, / (*breath, to give him time to consider the tragic results of his jealousy*)  
And then run mad indeed, stark mad; for all / (*breath to find the right phrase*)  
Thy bygone fooleries were but spices of it.

Once I started breathing this way throughout the speech, I began to feel like a woman on the verge of losing complete control. Working on my lines in this way, awakened my senses and opened up many new possibilities in understanding the mental state of the character. It was absolutely joyous.

A word of caution regarding this technique: It is a way of working on the form of the language. It is vitally important first to work on understanding the content and meaning of the language, then to work on form. Linklater warns, “To isolate the rules of poetic form from poetry’s source and content would be like separating a skeleton from the flesh, blood and breath that animate it. Form alone has no life.”<sup>25</sup> Fortunately, Dennis provided a nice foundation in understanding the content. This is wise. I’ve seen too many Shakespearean productions in which the actors could speak the lines beautifully

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<sup>25</sup> *Freeing Shakespeare’s Voice*, p. 121.

but the production lacked passion. The actors have to explore the richness of meaning in the words before working on form.

One final point about the breathing at the end of the line: none of this is written in stone. Dennis directed us to memorize the lines with the breath at the end of the line and to rehearse that way and then to forget it. In fact, there was a moment in the above speech, when Dennis instructed me to take a breath in the middle of a line because it simply needed it. I'd felt that, too, but had been trying to make it work. That's when I realized that this technique is just a tool, like any other, to help the actor reach a better understanding of their character but that all rules may be broken as long as the actor understands *why* she is breaking it.

This chapter has focussed primarily on the technique of breathing at the end of the line. I have not talked about the breath, itself, which is also an important factor. Eugen Herrigel comments on the usefulness of correct breath in *Zen in the Art of Archery*. At the beginning of his instruction, he learns how to draw the bow. His instructor asks him repeatedly to relax but days turn into weeks of failed attempts. His instructor explains:

"You cannot do it," explained the Master, "because you do not breathe right. Press your breath down gently after breathing in, so that the abdominal wall is tightly stretched, and hold it there for a while. Then breathe out as slowly and evenly as possible, and, after a short pause, draw a quick breath of air again – out and in continually, in a rhythm that will gradually settle itself. If it is done properly, you will feel the shooting becoming easier every day. For through this breathing you will not only discover the source of all spiritual strength but will also cause the source to flow more abundantly, and to pour more easily through your limbs the more relaxed you are."<sup>26</sup>

Many of us do not breathe "correctly." If I observe my breath in a relaxed state, it is different from my breath during the day when I'm under stress. I often do not allow a

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<sup>26</sup> *Zen in the Art of Archery*, p. 20.

full breath and have conditioned myself over the years to hold my abdominal muscles tightly, which prevents me from taking a full breath. Once Herrigel was able to accomplish the appropriate breath, he acknowledged that the result was “liberating.” His breathing rhythm became natural and it fueled his ability to draw the bow in a spiritual manner. He failed many times, though, in his attempt to control it. The Master admonished him, “That’s just the trouble, you make an effort to think about it. Concentrate entirely on your breathing as if you had nothing else to do.”<sup>27</sup>

This section from Herrigel’s book is similar to the chapter on “Breathing” in Kristin Linklater’s book, *Freeing the Natural Voice*. She begins by asking readers simply to notice their own breathing. She asks readers to, “begin to develop the ability to observe without *controlling*.” Later, she explains, “Conscious control of the breath will destroy its sensitivity to changing inner states, and severely curtail the reflex connection of breathing and emotional impulse.”<sup>28</sup> Herrigel’s teacher instructs him to control his breath but he is essentially helping Herrigel return to his own natural rhythm of breathing; this is the very core of Linklater’s approach to breath, as well. The result is a fuller, more rounded breath that supports the voice rather than impeding it. I have discovered my body opening to breathe much more freely than I have ever before experienced. Because the breath is not controlled or restricted, the mind is free to deal with what is happening in the moment.

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<sup>27</sup> *Zen in the Art of Archery*, p. 21.

<sup>28</sup> Kristin Linklater, *Freeing the Natural Voice*, p. 25.

## CHAPTER VII

### CHALLENGES

In this chapter, I will describe some of the goals and tactics I chose for each scene in which Paulina appears. I will also analyze potential problems and how I dealt with them. I have assigned a title for each scene based on a central theme from Paulina's perspective.

#### *Act II, scene ii: Freeing the Prisoner*

When I first read the play, I thought it odd that Paulina's introduction occurs so late. Paulina and Hermione are close friends, so it is peculiar that Paulina is absent from any earlier scenes with Hermione. Once Hermione is thrown into prison, Paulina appears out of nowhere to save her. To help establish our relationship, Dennis built in a court dance in the play's opening. As we all gathered for the dance, I approached Hermione and had a brief exchange with her. Since there are no scripted words here, we needed to establish our close bond through gestures. I gently touched her pregnant belly and she leaned forward to kiss my cheek. This brief encounter took place as the stage filled up with other characters greeting one another and moving into their places for the dance. The audience could easily have missed the moment between Paulina and Hermione. So, my first true scene had to communicate clearly my loyalty to her. Otherwise, none of my future actions would make sense.

To heighten the sense of urgency, I set a quick tempo for the opening, charging into the space from the back of the theatre, bellowing my first lines to the jailer. After establishing the urgency, I then had to maintain it throughout the scene. The lines support this. Each character often finishes the meter of the previous character's line, setting a quick tempo. Also, as Paulina devises a plan to take the baby to the king, her speech is halting as though she is putting the plan together in the heat of the moment. Some of the lines end in a peculiar fashion with weak word choices. For example: "And never to my red-looking anger be / The trumpet any more. Pray you, Emilia," which suggests that Paulina is trying to think of the right metaphor ("trumpet") and then immediately switching thoughts into enlisting Emilia's aid.

In this relatively short scene, Shakespeare beautifully introduces Paulina. There are several facets to her character, among them: Avenging Angel, Healer and Protector. She enters as an Avenger but when Emilia arrives, she suddenly softens as she inquires about the queen's health. Paulina desires to heal the rift in the court and to bring the king back to his senses. She is not the sort of person who shies from a battle and stands firm in the decision that she should be the person to approach the king. At the end of the scene, she soothes the jailer's fears by promising to protect him from harm if the king should blame him for allowing the baby to be removed from the cell.

Paulina is also a woman of logic. The jailer is afraid to allow the baby out of the cell. Paulina reasons that the baby entered the prison inside her mother's belly, so she is not a prisoner of the king. The baby's only prison was the womb and now that she has been delivered, she is no longer a prisoner. Therefore she may be removed from the cell without breaking the king's command.

*Act II, scene iii: The Duel*

This is a wonderful scene of tactical maneuvering. The challenge in this scene is identifying the variety of tactics and then successfully switching from one to the next. Paulina's first challenge is the group of lords guarding the king's chambers. She first attempts to charm them and enlist their aid. When they decline, she chides them for supporting the king's madness and feeding him just what he wants to hear in order to save their own necks. Her husband, Antigonus, is among the group.

I discussed the husband/wife relationship with the actor playing Antigonus and based on what we read in the text, we decided that the power dynamics in the relationship were balanced but that Paulina likely ruled the home and he would often acquiesce with good humor. In this scene, Antigonus fears for their lives. He already knows how violent and irrational the king has become and he fears Paulina will only worsen the situation. His efforts in the scene to hush me set up a nice conflict between the two of us. When Antigonus says to the king, "When she will take the rein, I let her run; / But she'll not stumble,"<sup>29</sup> the actor always sent me a warning look as if to say, "go on, but step carefully or we'll all be hanged." It was a lovely exchange for me because Paulina's next lines are a clear attempt to reason gently with the king. Paulina's gentleness quickly gives way to irritation when the Leontes mocks Hermione and she fiercely defends the queen's honor.

Paulina shows no fear of the king and sometimes talks to him as if he were a misbehaving child. I think it is entirely possible she was a grown woman in the court when the King was a young boy and could have been like a second mother to him. She

certainly takes liberties when speaking to him in this scene. The dynamics and tensions between these two characters were enormously fun to play. Nearly every set of lines were an opportunity to switch tactics. The lords added another exciting element to the mix. Lashing out, Paulina threatens to scratch out their eyes if they touch her then, just as quickly, she charms them with the baby, coaxing them to step in for a closer look at the child's resemblance to the king.

She is beaten in the end and makes the curious decision to leave the child in the middle of the room. I had to justify this action somehow. Why in the world would Paulina leave this helpless child at the mercy of a madman? Dennis suggested that I bless the baby to protect her, so as I placed the baby in the middle of the floor on the lines "Jove send her a better guiding spirit,"<sup>30</sup> I gestured as if placing a protection spell around the tiny bundle. Asking the gods to protect her, helped me to feel more comfortable in leaving the child behind but there is another reason why Paulina seems to abandon the child: this is her final attempt to persuade the king. If she returns the baby to the cell, she admits defeat and the baby will surely die. Placing the newborn in the middle of that huge space is Paulina's attempt at forcing the king's hand. She is trying to reach his heart. She hopes that if he will only pick up the child, he will come to his senses. At this point, she also turns the fate of the child over to the gods. I interpreted Paulina's lines, "What needs these hands" as meaning, "I am insufficient to this task, so I turn it over to the gods." Paulina's faith that the gods will protect the child enables her to leave that room without the baby in her arms.

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<sup>29</sup> II, iii, 50-51

<sup>30</sup> II, iii, 124-125

*Act III, scene ii: The Trial*

This scene is a particularly difficult bit of vocal acrobatics for any actor tackling this role. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Paulina exits as the queen's body is carried off. Leontes delivers an impassioned speech of roughly twenty-four lines. Dennis cut that monologue to about fifteen. As Leontes finishes his last word, offstage, Paulina wails, "Woe the while!" and enters on her next line. Dennis said he wanted my wail to shake the house and send shivers up spines.

Imagine walking offstage with a group of actors into the wings. There isn't much space. Everyone scatters, whispering excitedly to one another, while the crew pulls a piece of the set into the same space. I struggled just to hear my cue and at the same time, I was also preparing to let loose this tremendous wail. I had several concerns: Would I hear my cue? How do I possibly stay in character? How do I make such a forceful entrance with so little preparation time? Would I blow out my voice?

Dennis showed me how to achieve the wail. He instructed me to find a corner backstage and place one hand on each wall. Then I should completely relax the core of my body, only holding myself up with my arms and allow the breath to drop as far down into my body as possible. I was to imagine an open channel from my abdominal area up and out of my mouth and when the time came, to support the wail with this tremendous breath. This might have worked beautifully except I was never able to get to a corner without being run over by crew and set pieces. I resolved this by escaping as quickly as I could to an area between two leggings (the black curtains hanging down from the fly system) and squatting in a position I imagine looked as if I were giving birth in a field. I followed his instructions about the breath and the open channel. However, I never felt as



though I succeeded in bellowing out the exact sound I wanted. My voice invariably cracked at some point. I always felt as though I were trying to control the sound rather than letting it rise up out of me. Of course, I have no way of knowing if it ever inspired chills in anyone. The method I used in preparing for the moment was the best I could produce under the circumstances, and I found that even if my voice was not in the place, mentally, I felt quite prepared to re-enter the stage.

A second challenge in the speech is the moment Paulina announces the queen is dead. Since she reappears at the end of the play, is Paulina lying? I mulled this over and finally gave up trying to answer it. Dennis had told us to think of it as a fairy tale, so I stopped trying to find a logical explanation. There are no answers in the text. When asked how the queen could possibly be alive, Paulina's response is as mysterious as the situation, itself: "That she is living, / Were it but told you, should be hooted at / Like an old tale;"<sup>31</sup> Dennis had asked me to think of Paulina as a witch, so I imagined how I might have kept the queen in a state of limbo for sixteen years to wait for the appropriate moment to bring her back. The stars align when Perdita is restored to her rightful place in the royal court, so then I had to watch Leontes for some sign that he is now ready to reunite with his wife. I liked having that as an intention at the end of the play because it forced me to constantly watch Leontes. Ultimately though, what helped me make this decision was that I simply could not lie when I said, "The Queen, the sweet'st, dear'st creature's dead." I had to believe what I was saying. So, if I had to believe it, then it must be true. What the audience thought at the end of the play was of little concern to me. In fact, I enjoyed the idea that they might leave the theatre asking one another if the queen had actually been dead all those years or not.

A third challenge occurs in a shift at the end of this speech. I call it “Paulina’s apology.” Paulina hits the final note of raging at the king and he asks her to go on because he deserves every word. One of the lords admonishes Paulina for being too bold. A huge shift occurs in Paulina’s next speech which begins with, “I am sorry for ‘t;” Dennis had told us at the beginning of rehearsals to play the words we are speaking, no more and no less. So, I worked on making this passage as honest and as true as I could. Then, half-way through rehearsals, Dennis asked me to make the lines sarcastic. I went into shock. I didn’t know how to play sarcasm. Sarcasm is playing two things at once and I didn’t think we were supposed to do that with Shakespeare: say one thing but mean something else. To do this felt completely contrary to everything I had been working on up to this point. I struggled over it for several days. I found the solution in a strange place. I was reading *A General Theory of Love* written by three psychiatrists and came upon a section dealing with mood versus emotion. The authors explain,

... a mood is a state of enhanced readiness to experience a certain emotion. Where an emotion is a single note, clearly struck, hanging for a moment in the still air, a mood is the extended, nearly inaudible echo that follows. Consciousness registers a fading level of activation in the emotion circuits faintly or not at all.<sup>32</sup>

This passage jumped out at me and seemed to be the answer to my dilemma. I didn’t have to play two things at once. The previous section of the speech leading into this apology inspired a range of emotions from rage to grief. If I were to allow the echo of the energy from the previous speech to run through the apology, then the audience would likely interpret it as sarcasm. After rehearsing the apology several times with this in

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<sup>31</sup> V, iii, 115-117.

<sup>32</sup> *A General Theory of Love*, Thomas Lewis, M.D., Fari Amini, M.D., Richard Lannon, M.D., (Vintage Books, NY) 2000.

mind, I didn't have to think about it at all. The words fell out of my mouth with the appropriate stress and inflection.

Dennis said something quite profound to me one night in rehearsal about this scene. He said it was a scene about crushing grief for both Leontes and Paulina but in the end, they realize they only have each other. It is really a scene about coming together. We forge a friendship in this scene that will survive for sixteen years. At the top of the scene, I used an image that helped as I reminded him of each of his recent sins. I imagined that each sin was a huge boulder, each successively heavier than the last, and with each line, I piled another one on top of him hoping to crush him beneath the weight of his own transgressions. This really helped to create an internal build in the monologue. Once the rage was spent, I took a moment to look at Leontes, kneeling alone in the middle of the stage and my heart immediately went to him. I allowed the echoes of that spent rage to color the first lines of the final section of this long speech and then as I continued, I knelt beside him to seek some sort of comfort. My lines ended with the two of us holding onto each other like a life-line.

*Act V, scene i: Remembering the Dead*

I hated this scene in early rehearsals. Sixteen years have passed since the queen's death and Paulina seems to have spent the entire time reminding the king he is responsible. It's a tricky scene because Paulina could easily become overly pious and aloof. I struggled against communicating any sort of holier-than-thou attitude. One night, Dennis asked me to consider that my action in the scene is to heal Leontes. He said, "We honor the dead by remembering them and we will be healed through the

remembering.” I loved that logic because it dovetailed so nicely with the Healer image I had for Paulina.

Much of the scene is also a power struggle between Paulina and the two lords, Cleomenes and Dion. They want the king to remarry and Paulina must stop that from happening. Paulina wins the battle by getting Leontes to swear that he will marry only with Paulina’s consent. She strikes this bargain in an effort to appease everyone. She allows that he might marry again in order to keep the Lords at bay but with the proviso that she must approve the next bride. Paulina is waiting for the right time to reunite Leontes with Hermione. I determined that I was waiting for some sort of sign that his love for Hermione was pure and not just an echo of his grief.

*Act V, scene iii: Faith Awakened*

Another challenge I faced was in the scene prior to bringing the statue to life. When we started working the scene on our feet, I realized I was in real trouble. Four times, Paulina attempts to draw the curtain back over Hermione’s statue because Leontes seems so upset by it. By the third repetition, some of the actors were giggling and when I tried the fourth time, they were laughing out loud. I knew that if they were having trouble taking this moment seriously early in the rehearsal, there was no way an audience could keep a straight face. It cannot be a comic moment, under any circumstances. The attempts to draw the curtain back over the statue should heighten tension, not make people laugh.

The solution rested in my intentions each time I attempted to draw the curtain closed. Each attempt had to be a test for Leontes. I realized that if Paulina was waiting for the appropriate moment, then I had to find ways of putting Leontes to the test. I

discovered this when I increased the intensity and urgency behind my intent to cover the statue with each attempt and on the fourth attempt, I stepped directly up to Leontes and asked, "Shall I draw the curtain?" I said it with deliberateness and looked him straight in the eye. The actor playing Leontes returned the same intensity and without wavering, replied, "No, not these twenty years." We stood for a moment looking at each other and I thought, "Okay, he's ready now." I relaxed and stepped back from him, knowing I had gotten the answer I wanted. From an acting standpoint, I also knew I had solved my dilemma.

## CHAPTER VIII

### IN PERFORMANCE

*Then one day, after shot, the Master made a deep bow and broke off the lesson. "Just then 'It' shot!" he cried, as I stared at him bewildered. And when I at last understood what he meant I couldn't suppress a sudden whoop of delight. "What I have said," the Master told me severely, "was not praise, only a statement that ought not to touch you. Nor was my bow meant for you, for you are entirely innocent of this shot. You remained this time absolutely self-oblivious and without purpose in the highest tension, so that the shot fell from you like a ripe fruit. Now go on practicing as if nothing had happened."*<sup>33</sup>

The three or four days leading up to opening night for any show are filled with a mixture of excitement and panic as all the technical elements come together. This production was no different. Any attempt at being "in the moment" flies out the window as the actors juggle everything they have worked on with a new set, props, lights, sound and costumes. We usually have three days to add all of the new layers and make it appear as if we have lived in that world our entire lives. It's not easy and if the actor hasn't fully prepared his role by this point, then the task is nearly impossible. I felt as though Dennis had done a terrific job helping us prepare for the show. We were all confident that we knew what we were saying and because he did very little blocking, our movements onstage were organic and flexible enough to withstand unforeseeable changes. I had only two concerns going into performance: the costume and the blocking of the scene when I bring the baby to the king.

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<sup>33</sup> *Zen in the Art of Archery*, p. 52-53.

I remember looking over the costume designer's sketches early in the rehearsal process and realizing her concept for the Sicilian costumes was very formal and "contained." By that, I mean the women would wear corsets and tightly-fitted jackets with fitted sleeves, high collars and long skirts. This makes perfect sense for the show, but from an actor's standpoint, I was concerned about freedom of movement. In my fittings, I requested more room in the arms because of the nature of my movement in the play. I had envisioned Paulina as being more of a free spirit living in a highly formal world. I vowed to myself that I would find ways of making it all work. In rehearsals, I wore a corset and hard-soled shoes to give myself enough time to appear comfortable in both. In spite of my efforts, once I donned the final costume I felt confined. This affected my performance in technical rehearsals. Suddenly, I was walking differently and my voice became more formal than I had experienced in rehearsals. I asked a fellow graduate student who was assisting with the play to tell me her observations of my work in the costume; she verified what I already knew – that my character had shifted and had become more aloof. After three days of working in full costume, I was able to return to more of what I had captured in earlier rehearsals. I focused my energy on connecting with the other actors and making the clothes secondary. I understood Paulina's heart, I just had to work through these new obstacles to get back to her.

The costume designer complimented me. She said it looked as if I'd always moved around in long skirts. She made the comment after a dance rehearsal. I laughed and thanked her for the compliment but it was never an issue with me if I *could* move in the costume. Rather, my concern was whether I could move in a way that was honest to

the character. I still think that the Paulina the audience saw was much more formal than I would have liked.

As a side-note to the costume, the jacket I wore in the first half of the play was made of a solid black material that had imprints of tiny black dragons all over it. Of course, the audience could never possibly see that but I know the designer chose that fabric for Paulina because she has the heart to face dragons. She alone has the courage to stand up to a king. I imagined Paulina choosing that fabric for herself. I would touch it and it made me smile. I think the key in all of this is that the actor has very little control over what happens technically in a show. We have to take what we are given and then make it work.

My second concern revolved around the “baby” scene when Paulina brings the newborn princess to the king. There are several other lords in the scene, in addition to Paulina and Leontes. We never really blocked the scene and it was different in every rehearsal. Normally, I enjoy this sort of freedom but several of the lords had very little stage experience and we would sometimes find ourselves in impossible positions. Dennis trusted us to work out the problems and to a great extent, I think we did. Not knowing what was going to happen every night in performance actually helped me. I had to be fully aware and prepared for whatever might come. This proved enormously helpful on the Saturday evening performance.

On this particular night, I swept through the group of lords and onto the stage only to realize that the actor playing Leontes was in a much higher state of anxiety than I’d ever seen. He turned and I saw his eyes. They were absolutely wild. I assessed the situation and realized I could not play my tactics in the same way that night. I took a



deep breath and launched into the scene with him. The blocking was completely different but with every new move he made, I attempted to counter. At the beginning of the scene, I had to play the intentions much more carefully but he truly seemed to be a man about to lose control and if I were not careful, I could lose my head, not to mention the life of that little baby I held in my arms. That scene crackled. I didn't know what I was about to say or what tactic I was going to use next and it was exhilarating. This was onstage zen and it felt like flying on air currents. There was a sense of having no control over what was going to happen but being absolutely sure that I could handle any possible change in the current. Looking back on this experience, I realize that somehow every scene has to be played as if your fellow actors might do something different. If zen occurs when "self" is absent, then my entire focus must be on the other actors and I must find them utterly fascinating and unpredictable.

## CHAPTER IX

### REFLECTIONS

*You have now reached a stage where teacher and pupil are no longer two persons, but one. You can separate from me any time you wish. Even if broad seas lie between us, I shall always be with you when you practice what you have learned.*<sup>34</sup>

Nearly a year has passed since I performed Paulina. Since that experience, I have performed the role of Madame Arcati in Noel Coward's *Blithe Spirit*, directed by Professor James Tompkins, and also directed my own production of James McLure's *Laundry and Bourbon*. Dennis Krausnick's rehearsal process was such a unique process and it provided such a strong foundation for the actors that we were able to play and connect from the very beginning. Since each director has his or her unique approach to working on a show, that particular experience can never be duplicated. However, the tools I discovered during my experience with Dennis continue to be of use in my work with other directors. Professor Tompkins's approach to directing is vastly different from Dennis's approach and although both Madame Arcati and Paulina are spiritual women, they are extraordinarily different in other respects. So, working on *Blithe Spirit* was a terrific opportunity to test some of my new theories. Three tools I carried into rehearsals for *Blithe Spirit* were dropping-in, repetition and breath.

By dropping-in the role of Paulina, I learned the value of exploring various shades of meaning in the words. As I worked on the lines in *Blithe Spirit*, I spent much more time with individual words and phrases. Working alone, I tasted a word or phrase and as I spoke them out loud, I allowed my imagination to explore the various images that came

to the surface. I think this process helped me to develop a clear history for the character. I imagined her as a child having paranormal experiences and how she might have dealt with remarks from other children. Arcati talks about her childhood in the play so I never felt as if I were manufacturing her history from my imagination. Instead, I drew upon the playwright's words and allowed them essentially to bloom in my own imagination.

This process provided a nice foundation for my entrance at the top of the show. Arcati walks into a strange place for the purpose of conducting a séance and although she recognizes the faces of the others in the room, these people are not well-known to her. In early rehearsals, my first instincts were to play Madame Arcati as very sweet and pleasant. Unfortunately, this resulted in a character who was trying to win everyone's approval. Professor Tompkins pointed out that Arcati is a businesswoman and insisted I make her much more direct and matter-of-fact. He was absolutely right. As I worked on the lines and the imagery, I realized that a business-like demeanor makes perfect sense for the character. Arcati makes a living off her skills as a medium and would be accustomed to deflecting criticism from non-believers. She has had paranormal experiences since she was a child and her mother was also a medium, so the "extraordinary" is actually quite ordinary in Arcati's world view. This is not to say that she is unmoved by the presence of ghosts, on the contrary, Arcati adores all things "otherworldly" and communicating with spirits makes her a little giddy. Her excitement may be likened to that of a biologist discovering a new species. I did not drop-in the entire play for myself. However, if a section of the script began to feel too superficial, I would use dropping-in to help shed light on the trouble-spot.

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<sup>34</sup> *Zen in the Art of Archery*, p. 65.

Both Professor Tompkins and Dennis Krausnick use repetition in their rehearsals but the purpose behind the repetition is different for each director. Krausnick blocks very little. He focuses mostly on blocking transitions between scenes and leaves the internal blocking up to the actors. Through repetition, an actor explores the central actions of the scenes and how tension might increase or diminish based on her physical distance and spatial relationship to the other actors. Tompkins's rehearsals, on the other hand, are more like a dance rehearsal in that each move is carefully choreographed. The repetition serves to train the actor's muscle memory. The same is true for vocal work in the show. Tompkins conducts the voices as if it is music and then he fine-tunes pitch and inflections. Tompkins maintains tight control over the actors during the first several weeks of rehearsal, then roughly two weeks prior to the show's opening, he gradually loosens his grip, allowing the actors freedom in their choices within the boundaries he has already set. He gives them a framework for their characters and then allows them to work within that frame.

Once we had the freedom to play within our neatly defined boundaries, new connections formed. By the time the show closed, I was having a terrific time playing with the subtle changes every night. I never experienced anything as quite dramatic as what I described happening in *The Winter's Tale* on the Saturday evening performance. However, there were many moments of true connections between cast members. The feeling onstage was often one of playing a good game in which the rules shifted but we were each able to handle whatever shift came our way. The constant repetition during the rehearsal process contributed to this success. Our bodies and voices learned the patterns,

so we never had to think about them. This allowed us to let go of “self” in the performance and just play.

The breath work I used in *Blithe Spirit* was somewhat different than what I experienced in *The Winter's Tale* but it was just as important to keeping the text alive. Tompkins insisted on using the breath to drive through to the end of each line and to lift the inflection as often as possible at the end of every line. Even though the lines in *Blithe Spirit* are more modern and are not in verse, the same principle applies. The breath must sustain and fuel the thought to the very end. I have a tendency to let a line drop down in pitch at the end but by using breath to drive through the line, I am better able to play my action and intention. Dropping the pitch sounds as if I've already made up my mind about the topic and the subject is closed. Lifting the pitch at the end and energizing with breath, holds the tension and energy of the moment and sends it toward my acting partner. Now, it sounds as if I want something from them. This is certainly more fun to play and it holds the audience's attention.

As I continue working on other shows, I will fiercely hold onto repetition as one of the keys to attaining onstage zen. Repetition is really the most effective process for grounding an actor in the play. Once the actor is firmly grounded in the world of the place and how she moves/speaks within that world, then her mind is free to explore and play. The words have to come so readily to the lips that no effort goes into remembering lines. Even when a director cannot afford the time in rehearsals for much repetition, this is something I can do in my own time. Of course, it's more effective to repeat scenes with the other actors and that is my preferred method, but I can still do much in my time away from rehearsal to find the character's body/voice and to stamp the lines into my

memory. Additionally, now that I am more fully aware of how breath supports thought, this will also become a firm part of my rehearsal process. As for the dropping-in, I would like to continue using it as a tool to flesh out static moments in the play. It is certainly a useful technique in exploring all of the rich possibilities of language.

My experiences in graduate school and particularly in this past year have opened up new territories to explore. I am more aware of my weaknesses and my strengths. I have new tools. The joy of this work stems from everything I gather up along the journey. I am not concerned about a destination as long as the journey is filled with challenges and new discoveries. I continue to make discoveries. I continue to hone my craft. I continue to release my “self” so that I can work with my fellow actors to tell the most honest tale possible.

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